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ADDRESS

OF THE

COUNSELLORS TO THE FELLOWS

OF THE

MASSACHUSETTS MEDICAL SOCIETY.

BOSTON:

PRINTED BY JOHN ELIOT, JUN.

1812.

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ADDRESS.

IN consequence of the new organization of the Society, and the election of the greater part of those physicians, who have been regularly educated, or who have been distinguished in the practice of medicine, the Fellows are now scattered over a large extent of country, and some of them have been unable to attend its stated meetings. The labours of the institution have necessarily devolved on the Counsellors, who are chosen from the Society at large, and whose duty it is to watch over its interests. As the nature of this Institution has, within the last ten years, been essentially altered, and the objects and designs of the new system have not been generally and fully understood, and as an important epoch contemplated in the last legislative act for organizing the Society is near at hand, the Counsellors have thought it a part of their duty to impress on the minds of the Fellows the objects, for which it was formed, the means by which these objects may be obtained, and the special inducements to regard them.

The Massachusetts Medical Society was established by the Legislature of this Commonwealth for the public good, and its objects were to increase and diffuse medical knowledge. For these purposes it was requisite, that a systematic and regular education should be deemed necessary, previous to the commencement of professional duties, and that all possible inducements should be offered to young men to pursue with zeal, the course, which should be prescribed; and moreover to point out the modes by which the members of the profession might distinguish themselves, while they diffused a knowledge of medicine, and promoted the public good.

What measures have been pursued, and what influence they have had in advancing the interests of the science of medicine, may be shown by exhibiting a concise history of this Society.

The original constitution of the Society was very different from that by which it is now governed. The number of its Fellows was limited. It was confined to those, who had acquired a certain reputation, or who had distinguished themselves within their circle of professional occupations. It might have been thought, that the honour of an election into such a body would operate as an inducement to the younger part of the faculty to exertion; and in some instances no doubt this effect was produced. But to young men, who were engaged in their preparatory medical studies, or who were just entering on the active duties of their profession, the period at which they might hope to receive this honour, appeared too remote to have any permanent beneficial influence on their conduct.

The limitation of the number of Fellows almost necessarily rendered the Society local. The elections were made generally from those physicians, who resided in and near the metropolis, because their characters were best known, and from their vicinity they would be enabled to attend to the duties of the Society. For the same reason also, the laws of the Society could have no power to regulate, in any degree, the profession at large.

In this form, however, the Society was able to receive, select and publish communications; and a few years after its establishment the first number of their original papers was published.

It was obvious, however, after the experience of twenty years, that, whatever might have been the pleasure and advantage which the members themselves derived from this association, the influence on the public at large was not so great, as might have been expected. On investigating the cause of this failure it was found to result, not from any neglect or error in the administration of the affairs of the Society, but from the imperfect state of its constitution; and it was thought that some judicious changes in this, would be followed by corresponding advantages to the community. In

conformity with this opinion, and after a more perfect plan had been maturely considered, application was made to the Legislature, and the act of March, 1803, was passed, coinciding with the views of the Society.

The leading principles of the new system were as follows. First, to increase the number of the Fellows, so that it might embrace all the reputable practitioners of medicine and surgery already established in business, in the different parts of the Commonwealth. Secondly, to provide for the future admission of all persons of good character, who should prove themselves qualified to perform the great duties of the profession, which admission might be claimed by individuals as a right, and not be subject to the controul of any body of men whatever. Thirdly, to combine and direct the efforts of the great body, which should thus be formed, to the extension and increase of medical science. Fourthly, to employ the influence of all the respectable practitioners of medicine, who should thus be associated, in discountenancing those who should enter the profession without due preparation for the great and serious duties, which it imposes on them.

It will at once be perceived, that by this new arrangement it was intended to form, of the great body of the respectable members of the profession, a medical council for the Commonwealth; and as the Fellows of the Society are presumed to be necessarily exposed to expence, both of time and money, in their exertions for the public good, the Legislature thought proper to remunerate them in some degree for their labour. This compensation consisted in an exemption from serving in the militia, an arrangement which experience has proved to be equally useful to the public, and satisfactory to the fellows. This exemption, taken in connection with the right which every regularly educated physician, after a certain period, has to claim admission into the Society, it is presumed will operate as a strong motive for undertaking a regular system of education. In order to increase the inducement to a regular and complete course of studies, there is a provision in our Bye-Laws, for excluding from the countenance and patronage of the So-

ciety all persons, who should engage in the active duties of the profession, without having previously exhibited to them satisfactory evidence of their qualifications for practice.

On recurring to the Bye-Laws it will be found, that, after June 4, 1813, no person can be admitted to an examination by the Censors, who has not studied three years with a Fellow, or honorary member of the Society. To judge of the propriety of this regulation, it will be necessary to repeat what has already been remarked, that, by the new organization of this Society, it is intended to include all regular practitioners throughout the State. The object of this law is to ensure a good education to pupils, and to render the fellowship of the Society desirable. It would be easy to show, that the result of it must be beneficial to the medical student, to practitioners at large, and to the public.

As the Society is supposed to rank among its members only those who have received a regular scientific education, the student will have a better chance of being correctly instructed and duly qualified with a Fellow of the Society, than with an irregular practitioner. He is not, however, compelled by law to pursue this course. He may consult his feelings, or his convenience; but if the former mode obviously held out advantages superior to any other, these alone may be considered by him as sufficient to cause him to comply with the requisitions of the Society. There is no danger from this rule, that the terms of tuition may be rendered so high as to deter the student from putting himself under the direction of a Fellow of this Society, for the number of members is too great to allow of any monopoly of this kind.

To the profession at large this law cannot be considered as a subject of complaint. Every respectable physician is here supposed to be a member of the Society. The election of reputable practitioners is an object, which the Counsellors have uniformly and anxiously kept in view; but notwithstanding they have made great exertions to effect it, they still are conscious that there must have been omissions, from the difficulty of obtaining accurate information, and from the distance at which some of those, who merit

this honour, reside. It should be considered as a part of the duty of the Fellows to point out from time to time to the Counsellors, those practitioners, whose education, habits and reputation may justly entitle them to admission into the Society.

With respect to the advantages which the community is to derive from this regulation, it is obvious, that if the number of teachers be diminished, the responsibility of those who are still to educate for the profession of medicine must be more sensibly experienced; and thus if more attention be paid to this subject, the greater is the probability, that those, who engage in the awful duties of a physician, will be more duly qualified; few there are who would not prefer the attendance of a regular scientific practitioner to the uncertain and desultory prescriptions of an empiric. If it be granted, that the lives of our citizens are safer in the hands of the well informed and regularly bred physician, than when under the controul of a presuming and ignorant pretender, it is obviously for the interest of the public, that students should be induced to place themselves under those best qualified to teach them. It will thus be evident, that the regulation under consideration is calculated to promote the all important object of medical education.

Does this regulation seem to show, that there is a disposition to monopolize privileges? The Society has been accused of fostering this spirit, but without foundation. A disposition of this sort could not easily have been engendered in a Society already composed of more than two hundred and fifty members, who are scattered over a great territory. Besides, the attainment of such a monopoly is impracticable, since the law of 1803, passed at the request of the Society, provides, that every person intended for the profession, by adopting such measures as will ultimately establish his reputation, viz. receiving a regular education, may obtain admission into the Society. The Institution and all its advantages are open to all those, who, even if the Society did not exist, would have too much honour, and too nice a sense of duty, to engage in the practice of an arduous and responsible profession. before they

were satisfied of the justness of their claims to the public patronage and support.

To show the facility with which admission is conducted, and the extent to which it may be carried, we shall just advert to the modes provided for this purpose. These modes are two, *by Right*, and *by Election*. *Admission of right* may be claimed by Licentiates of the Society, and Medical Graduates at Harvard College, with the proviso, however, that they have been reputably engaged in the practice of medicine three years from the reception of the licence or diploma, and have supported an honourable private character. The admission is gained on application, and exhibiting a certificate of the above qualifications, signed by two gentlemen of respectability of one of the learned professions, residing in or near the place, or places, where the applicant has practised Medicine or Surgery; or when a District Society exists, a certificate from said Society.

Admission by election takes place in the following manner. 1st. A candidate for admission must be nominated at a meeting of the Counsellors by some one or more Fellows of the Society. 2d. After three months nomination, the candidate may be balloted for at any stated meeting of the Counsellors; but previous to the balloting, it is expected, that the person, who has made the nomination, will himself satisfy the Counsellors, that the candidate is a respectable and honourable practitioner of medicine. If the requisite information cannot be obtained, the nomination is allowed to remain on file, for future examination. It is understood, with certain exceptions, that the candidate for admission should not have commenced practice subsequent to the year 1805; because since that period every practitioner has had an opportunity of entering the Society *by right*, after obtaining a license to practice. The avenues for admission to the Society are therefore as broad as they can consistently be made; for it is obvious, that if individuals, destitute of the above qualifications, were allowed to become Fellows, the intention of its establishment would be defeated. The Counsellors do indeed apprehend, that they have not admitted all, whose

character entitles them to a connection with the Society ; but this has arisen, not from a want of disposition on their part, but from the difficulty of obtaining an adequate knowledge of the candidates. The Counsellors therefore do earnestly call on the Fellows of the Society, and especially those situated in remote parts of the State, to give information of all such individuals, as are possessed of the requisites for admission into the Society ; while at the same time they must recollect, that loose and general information, as being liable to produce the most injurious mistakes, will not promote the objects, which the Counsellors have so much at heart.

The honourable the Legislature of this Commonwealth, when they passed the act of March, 1803, relating to this Society, contemplated it not merely as a collection of individuals for the adoption of professional rules and regulations ; but they viewed it as an association calculated to improve the medical science of this State, "by a communication of cases and experiments. and a diffusion of knowledge in medicine and surgery." They foresaw, however, from the great extent of territory, over which the fellows must be scattered, that frequent personal communications between them, at any general meetings of the Society, would be impracticable. In order to remedy this difficulty, and enable the Fellows to convene frequently for the purpose of improvement in medical science, the act of 1803 authorizes the organization of district societies. It enacts, "that the Counsellors, upon the application of "any two members of the Society, may establish within such districts "and portions of this commonwealth, as they shall think expedient, "subordinate societies and meetings, to consist of the Fellows of the "said Corporation, residing within such districts respectively, where- "in the communication of cases and experiments may be made ; and "the diffusion of knowledge in medicine and surgery encouraged "and promoted," &c. These Societies, which ought to be viewed as the principal organs for the scientific improvement of the Fellows, never have been constituted in the extent, which the act of the

Legislature contemplates, and the good of the profession requires. Two or three district societies have indeed been organized, and the advantages of these have sanctioned the opinion that was entertained of their utility. But in order to complete the original design, and enable all the Fellows of the Society to become active in mutual and general improvement, it seems necessary, that every portion of the Fellows of the general Society should be embraced in some district Society. The Counsellors do therefore strongly recommend, that the Fellows in every part of the State should effect the organization of such district Societies ; and support them with that spirit, which is demanded, in the present state of medical improvement, in this Commonwealth.

The Counsellors cannot conclude this address without congratulating the Society on its beneficial effects on the medical profession, since the new organization. In the larger towns, the continual communication among physicians had produced arrangements, which in some respects anticipated the regulations of the Society ; while in the very remote parts of the State, its salutary influence has not yet been experienced. But in the great and populous counties which constitute the body of the state, the Counsellors have great reason to believe, that the operation of the Society's regulations has produced the most beneficial consequences, and that these are daily becoming more sensible. A friendly intercourse has been established between distant members of the profession. The disposition for acquiring an adequate education has been cultivated. Medical knowledge has been promoted by publications. Secret and dishonourable practice has been discouraged ; and the public have received a mark, which they may employ to distinguish between the impostor, and the modest, well educated physician, whose reputation brightens by time and examination. In fine, the Counsellors are firmly persuaded, that the more the objects and effects of this Society become known, the more must the institution be esteemed by the profession and the public. They

do therefore most earnestly recommend that you will neglect no opportunity of publishing and explaining the design of this Society, its actual operation, and the advantages the public will derive from a continuance of its prosperity and vigour.

In behalf of the Counsellors,

JOHN WARREN, *President.*

Boston, Feb. 10, 1813.

NOTICE. The Fellows of the Society are informed, that a new publication of the original communications and dissertations of the Society is now contemplated, and will probably be prepared for delivery, at the annual meeting in June. The Counsellors have also made arrangements for completing a new diploma, agreeably to the instructions of the Society, which will be ready for general distribution in the month of April.

Officers of the Society for the present Year.

JOHN WARREN, M. D. *President.*

JOSHUA FISHER, M. D. *Vice President.*

DAVID TOWNSEND, A. M.

THOMAS WELSH, M. D.

AARON DEXTER, M. D.

JOSIAH BARTLETT, M. D.

WILLIAM SPOONER, M. D.

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THOMAS WELSH, M. D. *Corresponding Secretary.*

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SHIRLEY ERVING, *Librarian and Cabinet Keeper.*

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